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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Monday, May 4, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION).

Subject: "A May Morning Breakfast." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and The Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

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Cooks and gardeners ahoy! We're going to talk about rhubarb today. Or pie plant, if you prefer the early American name for this spring delicacy. Whatever you call it, the theme for today is rhubarb for breakfast, dinner and supper. Rhubarb in the home and also in the garden.

It was a coincidence that the Menu Specialist and W.R.B., the garden Adviser, both happened to be talking about rhubarb to me yesterday. The Menu Specialist, it seems, has a craving for rhubarb conserve for breakfast. Especially for Sunday breakfast. And even more especially for a May Sunday breakfast. She became so enthusiastic, as she told me about it, that she sat right down and planned a menu for just such a breakfast. Along with the menu she gave me the recipe for that delightful concoction, rhubarb conserve. And for good measure she added two rhubarb pudding recipes. Then W.R.B. came along and was good enough to give me some advice on growing this plant in the home garden. So we're all set for a good time.

Wait just one minute, though. Just one minute, while we settle that old dispute as to whether rhubarb is a fruit or a vegetable. Some people I know claim that it should be classed with the vegetables because it is a stalk like celery and asparagus. But its flavor, acidity and juiciness require cooking with sweetening and therefore using as a fruit on the table. So if it is used as a fruit and made into puddings, pies, sauces and such, why not call it a fruit? Agreed? All right. Fruit it is.

There are several good reasons why this plant is an old-time favorite. It is the first fresh fruit from the garden in the spring and it has a refreshing tart taste and a lovely rosy color. It can be made into many delectable dishes. When it is plentiful and inexpensive or when you have a good supply in your garden, why not treat your family to it often and in different ways? It isn't necessary to stick to the traditional pie when there are so many puddings, beverages and sauces that can be made from it. If your family likes it, why not also can a supply for use next winter? You can put it up in the form of sauce, conserve or just plain juice. Wouldn't a rhubarb tapioca pudding taste pretty good some day next January? Some day, for example, when you are trying to think of a dessert with a new and different flavor.

Forced rhubarb matures quickly so is very tender and requires very short cooking. Sauce made from it is generally weak in color but delicious in flavor. Rhubarb like so many good things from the garden loses all its charm if it is overcooked. All its charm and, I might add, all its personality. The stalks may look sturdy, but in reality they are delicate in structure and contain a great deal of water. It doesn't take much to break them down and turn what might have been delicious and attractive sauce into pale unpalatable soup. And rhubarb soup is not one of the foods recommended for making your husband happy. Those pink pieces should hold their shape in the juice and not fall to bits. How to keep them in shape? Well, discard the leaves, wash the stalks, and cut them in pieces about an inch long. Never peel the stalks. That skin is useful. It helps hold the pieces in shape and gives the pleasant pink color. When making sauce, you can either drop the pieces in syrup and cook them, or you can bake them with sugar and no water in a covered baking dish.

Did I say discard the leaves? I meant to. The leaves are never used in cooking. Never. They contain too much oxalic acid to be fit to eat.

Speaking of personality, I suppose you gardeners know that this is one of those plants that enjoys a bracing climate. W.R.B. tells me that it grows best in the colder parts of this country because it needs freezing in winter.

"Well, what," I asked him, "What are the housewives down South going to do about their pie-plant pies if they can't provide freezing weather in their rhubarb patches? And this is such a good year for those pies with sugar so cheap."

W.R.B. says that in parts of the South rhubarb grows fairly well, if the plantings are renewed every three or four years, using roots brought down from northern sections. The best rule, however, is to plant rhubarb only in localities where the temperature drops to zero or below.

Now a little more information for gardeners. Rhubarb is propagated by seeds and root divisions. If you divide and reset the roots, the stems may be pulled by the second year. Growing from seed takes a little longer.

Rich soil is the main essential for growing good rhubarb, so use plenty of compost and fertilizer in preparing the place where new plants are to be set. Divide the old hills and plant the new settings either late in the fall or very early in the spring. Five or six hills will furnish enough for the ordinary family and the hills should be 3 or 4 feet apart. Set the crown or root divisions so that the tips will be about 3 inches below the surface. Keep the weeds down. Cut out the seed stalks. Give the plants plenty of fertilizer, and water them during dry weather.

If you want long, tender stalks, take an old barrel and knock out the bottom. Stand this over a hill of rhubarb and watch the leaf stems stretch upward until the leaves are above the top of the barrel.

So much for the garden. Now for our breakfast menu and the recipes. This is planned for a leisurely breakfast on Sunday morning. Orange juice; Fried ham; Rhubarb conserve with Graham muffins; Coffee. Milk, of course, for the children.

Rhubarb conserve contains six ingredients. Here they are:

4 cups of rhubarb cut fine
4 cups of sugar
Juice and grated rind of 2 lemons
Juice and grated rind of 2 oranges
1 cup blanched almonds cut in small pieces, and
1/4 teaspoon of salt.

I'll repeat that list (REPEAT):

Combine all the ingredients except the nuts. Heat the mixture slowly until the sugar is dissolved; then boil rapidly until it is clear. The time of cooking depends on the tenderness of the rhubarb. Be careful not to cook it too long and so lose the attractive pink color and fresh flavor of the rhubarb. Add the nuts, stir well, and let the mixture cool before pouring into clean jelly glasses. If it is put in hot, the nuts will all rise to the top. This amount will fill about 8 jelly glasses, making a little more than three pounds of conserve.

There isn't time today to give you both the recipes for the excellent rhubarb puddings I mentioned, so I'll give just one today and tomorrow if you'll bring your pencils I'll give you the other.

Here's the recipe for Rhubarb Betty:

4 tablespoons melted butter or other fat
1/4 teaspoon of salt
1 quart fine, dry bread crumbs
1 quart sweetened rhubarb sauce, or 2 quarts raw sliced rhubarb, sugar to sweeten, and
Cinnamon or nutmeg.

Just five ingredients. I'll repeat them. (REPEAT):

Mix the fat and salt with the crumbs. Then place the rhubarb and the crumbs in alternate layers in a greased baking dish, and sift the cinnamon or nutmeg over the top. Bake the pudding in a moderate oven. If rhubarb sauce is used, the baking will require about 20 minutes. If raw rhubarb is used, however, cover the baking dish at first and bake for 25 minutes -- or until the rhubarb is tender. Serve the pudding hot with or without hard sauce.

Tomorrow:- We'll spend most of our time talking about some play outfits for children's summer wear.

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